

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 EB-07

TRSE-00 OMB-01 /066 W

----- 086363

P 102000Z DEC 76

FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0833

INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY

AMCONSUL MONTREAL PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, CA

SUBJECT: FURTHER QUEBEC REACTION TO FINMIN MEETING

REF: QUEBEC 0377

1. FORMER QUEBEC FINANCE MINISTER RAYMOND GARNEAU SAID DECEMBER 8 THAT PQ STAND AT FEDERAL PROVINCIAL TALKS DECEMBER 6-7 WAS EXACTLY THAT PROPOSED BY HIM BEFORE THE NOVEMBER 15 ELECTION AND THAT HE WAS NOT SURPRISED CONFERENCE WAS A FAILURE. GARNEAU FEELS THAT QUESTIONS ARE OF SUCH IMPORTANCE THAT ONLY PREMIERS CAN DECIDE THEM. GARNEAU EXPRESSED SOME CONCERN AT APPARENT SATISFACTION OF HIS SUCCESSOR, JACQUES PARIZEAU, AT THE FEDERAL INTRANSIGENCE IN THE FACE OF A UNITED PROVINCIAL DEMAND FOR GREATER TAXATION RESOURCES. GARNEAU CONCLUDED THIS SATISFACTION MAY WELL BE PART OF PQ STRATEGY TO EMPHASIZE FAILURE OF FEDERALISM.

2. UNION NATIONALE LEADER RODRIGUE BIRON CHARGED GOC'S REJECTION OF UNITED PROVINCIAL POSITION WOULD DO MORE TO PROMOTE CAUSE OF QUEBEC INDEPENDENCE THAN WOULD THE POLICIES OF PQ. BIRON TOLD A NEWS CONFERENCE THAT INDIRECT ARTISANS OF SEPARATION RIGHT NOW ARE MUCH MORE TRUDEAU AND HIS FRIENDS THAN LEVESQUE AND HIS. BIRON, WHO IS BELIEVED TO HAVE CLOSE LINKS WITH SOME PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES IN THE TRADITION OF PAST UN/PC ELECTORAL ALLIANCES, STATED - NOT UNEXPECTEDLY - THAT

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GOC STANCE WAS NOT FAULT OF FEDERAL SYSTEM, BUT OF MEN HOLDING

OFFICE IN OTTAWA. HE SAID THAT HE WAS DISAPPOINTED BUT NOT REALLY SURPRISED AT OUTCOME. BIRON NOTED THAT PROVINCIAL ACCORD ON RETURN OF TAXATION RESOURCES TO PROVINCE IS A TESTAMENT TO UN FOUNDER, MAURICE DUPLESSIS, WHO WAS ALL ALONE WHEN HE BEGAN QUEBEC'S DRIVE FOR RETURN OF TAXATION RESOURCES.

3. RENE LEVESQUE SAID THAT FINMIN TALKS ENDED IN A SORT OF DEAD-END. "EVERYTHING HAS BEEN LEFT IN SUSPENSE UNTIL MONDAY'S (PREMIERS) CONFERENCE." HE ADDED THAT GOQ IS STILL PREPARING ITS AGENDA FOR THE UPCOMING CONFERENCE. JACQUES PARIZEAU COMMENTED THAT HE WAS SURPRISED THAT COMMON BARGAINING POSITION OF PROVINCES LASTED UNTIL THE END OF FINMIN CONFERENCE AS PROVINCIAL COMMON FRONTS HAVE SO OFTEN COLLAPSED IN PAST. IN RESPONSE TO JOURNALIST, PARIZEAU SAID CONFERENCE WAS NEITHER VICTORY NOR DEFEAT FOR PQ GOVERNMENT AS CONFERENCES CANNOT BE SO SCORED.

4. COMMENTS: GARNEAU'S OBSERVATIONS ARE CONSISTENT WITH REMARKS OF INTERLOCUTEUR IN REFTEL TO EFFECT THAT GOQ GOAL AT CONFERENCE WAS TO CONTINUE TO WORK FOR ALREADY ESTABLISHED PROVINCIAL VIEWS ON FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS. SEVERAL EDITORIAL WRITERS IN PROVINCE HAVE EXPRESSED SAME WORRY AS GARNEAU CONCERNING PARIZEAU'S RATHER SMUG SATISFACTION CONFERENCE "FAILED." GOQ UNDOUBTEDLY WAS NOT ACTIVELY PROMOTING CONFERENCE'S FAILURE AS IT HAS SOME HOPES FOR LONG STEP-BY-STEP NEGOTIATING PROCESS WITH OTTAWA. HOWEVER, GIVEN COMMITMENT EVENTUALLY HOLD REFERENDUM AFTER PREPARING (EDUCATING) POPULATION FOR IT, PQ CAN BE EXPECTED TO COMMENT ACTIVELY - AS PARIZEAU DID - ON ALL SETBACKS. GOVERNMENT'S PROBLEM WILL BE TO KEEP THE PROPER TONE IN THEIR COMMENTS SO AS TO CALL VOTERS' ATTENTION TO "FAILURES" BUT NOT OVERREACT. AS LEVESQUE REMARKED, FISCAL PROBLEMS NOW PASSED TO PREMIERS. ONE HAS FEELING HERE THAT GOQ STILL HAS NOT DECIDED DETAILS OF ITS APPROACH. GIVEN GOQ UNPREPAREDNESS AND DIFFICULT NATURE OF FISCAL PROBLEMS, FEW HERE EXPECT ANY FURTHER RESOLUTION TO COME FROM MONDAY'S MEETING.
GARLAND

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, PERSONAL OPINION, FINANCE, PROVINCE, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, FEDERALISM
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 10 DEC 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ellisoob
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976QUEBEC00382
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760457-0147
From: QUEBEC
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761254/aaaabuhc.tel
Line Count: 98
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 QUEBEC 377
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ellisoob
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <15 APR 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <04 AUG 2004 by ellisoob>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FURTHER QUEBEC REACTION TO FINMIN MEETING
TAGS: PINT, CA, (GARNEAU, RAYMOND), (BIRON, RODRIGUE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006